



What Policy Options can Promote Climate Change Awareness and Adaptation in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?

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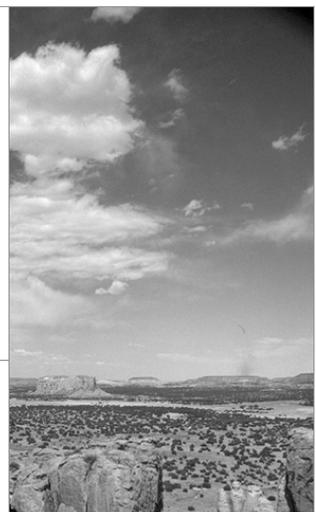


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Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is known to be especially vulnerable to climate change impacts because of its fragile ecosystem and human activities such as gas flaring that have heightened the propensity of climate change and its impacts in the region.

The agricultural sector in the region could be gravely endangered if nothing is done to adapt to the climate change phenomenon. However, in seeking to evolve innovative adaptive measures to climate change, it may be pertinent to ask the following policy research questions:

- > What policy gaps constrain climate change awareness and adaptation in the Niger Delta?
- > How much knowledge do Niger Delta farmers have about climate change and its impacts?
- > What are the sources of climate change related information and how important are they to farming communities?
- > What gaps exist in initiatives to promote climate change awareness and build adaptive capacities of farming communities?

Arguably, there is an urgent need to formulate and implement policies to raise more awareness about climate change and its impacts. In addition, making information on climate change adaptation more widely available and more easily accessible to farmers in the Niger Delta region appears imperative and cannot be over-emphasized.

What policy gaps constrain climate change awareness and adaptation in the Niger Delta?

The main policy gaps that currently constrain climate change awareness and adaptation in the Niger Delta include lack of policy on climate change in Nigeria, tardiness in the enforcement of regulations aimed at halting anthropogenic activities that exacerbate climate change, absence of a statutory body charged with coordination of climate change information or promoting adaptation measures in Nigeria, weak or non-existent linkages of existing structures with areas most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change such as the Niger Delta region, lack of a comprehensive adaptation framework for climate change at

National, Regional, State or local levels and limited capacity of universities for climate change research and advocacy.

How much knowledge do Niger Delta farmers have about climate change and its impacts?

Current research indicates that although there is a high level of awareness of climate change in the region, knowledge of Niger Delta farmers on the adverse effects of the changing climate leaves much to be desired. In fact, as much as 60% of farmers know little or nothing about climate change and its impacts. Knowledge of climate change impacts is related to availability and accessibility of information on the phenomenon.

What are the sources of climate change information and how important are they to the farming communities?

The mass media, though the main sources of climate change information to the farmers, has not lived up to its responsibility of informing and educating the citizens on climate change issues. The power of CBOs such as the well-attended Women's August Meetings in Igbo-speaking areas of the Niger Delta and the influential faith-based organizations has yet to be harnessed to spread the news on climate change.

What gaps exist in initiatives to promote climate change awareness and build adaptive capacities of farming communities?

Climate change awareness and adaptation campaigns and advocacy enterprises by NGOs and civil society groups in the region have not targeted and involved farmers. Initiatives to build capacity of farmers in Niger Delta for resilient adaptation to climate change are currently lacking. There seems to be little awareness of the existence and work of Climate Change Committees in the National Assembly.

Scoping the gaps for policy and advocacy

In the light of the above, it becomes imperative to:

- > Formulate a comprehensive climate change policy at national, state and local levels will be a necessary first step towards dealing with the challenge of climate change in Nigeria.
- > Harness the mass media in influencing attitudes and behavior. Programmes dedicated to climate change should be aired regularly on radio and television stations preferably in local languages. Awareness programmes which illustrate the impact of climate change, through jingles on television, radio and drama would be apposite.
- > Note that as of August 2010, Nigeria has a tele-density of 58.52 with mobile GSM having 74,074,793 active lines (Data from: <http://www.ncc.gov.ng/subscriberdata.htm>; accessed 01:11:10). This implies that mobile telephony is accessible to at least half of Nigeria's population. Telecommunication operators in Nigeria could as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) send short messages (SMS) on climate change to their clients from time to time effective way of bringing climate change information to Nigerian farmers.
- > Mainstream climate change into Nigeria's development goals namely the 7-point Agenda and Vision 20:2020 will make socioeconomic and political sense because a clear link has been established between global poverty and climate change.
- > Strengthen existing institutions to undertake research and policy advocacy into challenges of climate change and adaptation measures.
- > Strengthen the capacity of implementing agencies through training and retraining of personnel.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Cognizant of the need to increase the level of awareness of the climate change phenomenon and to build the capacities of farming communities in the Niger Delta for resilient adaptation, the following policy recommendations are made:

- > Immediate establishment of a statutory body to be named National Climate Change Commission of Nigeria to coordinate policy and programmes on climate change adaptation at the national level. Similar bodies at the state and local levels are also recommended.

- > Immediate convocation of a national conference to formulate climate change policy in Nigeria. To get maximum political support for this, it is recommended that this policy conference be organized under the auspices of the Presidency.
- > Improved funding for postgraduate training and research in universities already running programmes in climate change and related subjects.
- > Harnessing the power of the media, faith-based organizations, CBOs in creating more awareness and enlivening the climate change debate.
- > Regular and frank engagement of National Assembly Committees on Climate change with the Nigerian public in Town Hall Meetings and communication of activities of the Committees in Nigerian languages. This will go a long way in improving public perception and awareness
- > Telecoms operators should be encouraged as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to send SMS regularly to their clients on climate change and adaptation measures for climate change.



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